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May 7, 1962

Talking Paper

USSR Proposal to Ban Military Reconnaissance Satellites

The Problem

The Soviets have asked the United States to comment upon a Soviet reconnaissance proposal during the course of bilateral consultations in New York on May 8 in preparation for the May 28 Geneva meetings of the Legal Subcommittee of the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.

The Soviets propose a joint US-USSR declaration banning the use of satellites for "military reconnaissance purposes". The proposal was first mentioned by Blagonravov to Dr. Dryden on March 28 in New York and subsequently advanced, as an official proposal, by Timerbaev to Peter Thacher of USUN on April 26 in New York.

United States Position

The United States should indicate firmly to the Soviets that their proposal is unacceptable. They may be told that:

(1) International law imposes no barriers upon observation from outside the territorial limits of States. Such observation is peaceful in character. Consequently, the making of observations of the earth from outer space is an entirely legitimate activity. It does not interfere with other activities on earth or in space.

(2) The peaceful character of observations from space is not altered by their being made by military personnel. We consider the observations made by Major Titov while aboard the Vostok II (as indeed any other observation activities which the USSR may be conducting) as peaceful, and we consider his military status and the intent of his observations to be irrelevant.

(3) We believe that a significant contribution may be made to the maintenance of international peace and security by satellite observation programs. These programs should in the future be able to give States a clearer idea of terrestrial activities and thus help deter any aggressive threat or use of force.

(4) The interdependence of the uses to which photographic data may be put -- civilian and military -- make it impossible to distinguish between the kind of observation which is universally regarded as permissible and the kind of observation to which the Soviets seem to object. Observation of the earth may be performed by astronauts as tourists and scientists, by TIROS satellites for humanitarian public service purposes relating to weather prediction, and by other instrumentalities for such purposes as resource surveys, engineering

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and development projects, and mapping remote areas. We cannot agree with the Soviet suggestion of April 26 that low resolution cameras may be approved while high resolution apparatus is to be condemned. Nor can we agree to call into question certain observation programs as somehow malignant in purpose when these are objectively the same as other programs.

(5) The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space is not a disarmament forum. Because the United States is deeply committed to the goal of reserving space for exclusively peaceful purposes, we have proposed in Stage I of our April 18 outline treaty on disarmament that States would agree to cooperate in the peaceful use of outer space and not to place in orbit weapons of mass destruction. We propose also that production, stockpiling, and testing of booster for space vehicles would be subject to agreed limitations. Effective measures of verification are proposed for these and other disarmament measures.

Clearances:

L - Mr. Meeker
UNP - Mr. Crosby

S/AE - Mr. Packard
DOD/ISA - Col. John

ACDA - Messrs. Beam
and Bunn

L:L/UUA:HReis

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